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978-1-107-14902-1 — The Rover

Joseph Conrad , Edited by Alexandre Fachard , J. H. Stape

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THE
CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF
THE WORKS OF
JOSEPH CONRAD

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THE ROVER

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

JOSEPH CONRAD'S PLACE in twentieth-century literature is now firmly established. Although his novels, stories and other writings have become integral to modern thought and culture, the need for an accurate and authoritative edition of his works remains. Owing to successive rounds of authorial revision, transmissional errors and deliberate editorial intervention, Conrad's texts exist in various unsatisfactory and sometimes even confused forms.

During the last years of his life he attempted to have his works published in a uniform edition that would fix and preserve them for posterity. But although trusted by scholars, students and the general reader alike, the received texts published in the British and American collected editions, and in various reprintings of them since 1921, have proved to be at least as defective as their predecessors. Grounded in thorough research in the surviving original documents, the Cambridge Edition is designed to reverse this trend by presenting Conrad's novels, stories and other prose in texts that are as trustworthy as modern scholarship can make them.

The present volume contains a critical text of Conrad's novel *The Rover*. Apart from the final portion of the second chapter, which is absent from the first typescript, the Cambridge text of the novel takes as its copy-text the first revised typescript, held at the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. The copy-text is emended to incorporate authorial revisions drawn from earlier and later authoritative documents as well as editorial emendations to correct errors.

The 'Introduction' provides a literary history of the work focused on its genesis, sources and early reception, including its place in Conrad's life and art. The essay on 'The Text' traces the textual history of the volume, examines the sources of its individual texts and explains the policies followed in editing them. The 'Apparatus' records basic textual evidence, documenting the discussion of genealogy and authority laid out in 'The Text: An Essay' as well as other editorial decisions; and the 'Textual Notes' deal with cruxes and textual issues.

The 'Explanatory Notes' comment on specific readings that require glosses, dealing with sources, identifying real-life place-names and related matters. Glossaries explain nautical terms and foreign words and phrases. Supplementing this material are maps and illustrations.

The textual essay, textual notes, appendices and 'Apparatus' are designed with the textual scholar and specialist in mind, while the 'Introduction', 'Explanatory Notes' and glossaries are intended primarily for a non-specialist audience.

The support of the institutions listed on p. xi has been essential to the success of this series and is gratefully acknowledged. In addition to those, and the individuals and institutions listed in the Acknowledgements, the General Editors and the Editorial Board also wish to thank the Trustees and beneficiaries of the Estate of Joseph Conrad, and Doubleday and Company for permission to publish these new texts of Conrad's works.

THE GENERAL EDITORS

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by the Committee on Scholarly Editions of the Modern Language Association; and Laura Kiernan for seeing the volume through the Committee's evaluation process.

Gratitude is also due to Allan H. Simmons; to Don Shewan for his work on the maps; and to Burke A. Shiffler, Librarian, Des Moines Public Library, for answering a query about the novel's serialization. Lastly, at Cambridge University Press gratitude is due to Linda Bree for ongoing support and advice; to Victoria Parrin, who saw the volume through production; and to Hilary Hammond for her copy-editing.

Alexandre Fachard is pleased to acknowledge a grant from the Fonds national suisse de la recherche scientifique in 2012 that permitted on-site work. We are particularly indebted to the Joseph Conrad Society (UK) for a grant-in-aid of research from the Juliet and Mac McLauchlan Bequest.

Oxford University Press generously granted permission to repurpose the Explanatory Notes and Glossaries that appeared in the Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Rover*, edited by Andrzej Busza and J. H. Stape (1992). The explanatory material in the present volume revises, amplifies and corrects the information offered in that reading edition.

For their support of the Edition we also wish to express gratitude to present and former administrators of Kent State University, including, in alphabetical order, Rudolph O. Buttler, Carol A. Cartwright, Cheryl A. Casper, Ron Corthell, Joseph H. Danks, Todd Diacon, Robert Frank, Paul L. Gaston, Alex Gildzen, Cara L. Gilgenbach, Charlee Heimlich, Dean H. Keller, Sanford E. Marovitz, Tim Moerland, Thomas D. Moore, Stephen H. Paschen, Terry P. Roark, Michael Schwartz, F. S. Schwarzbach, Carol M. Toncar and Eugene P. Wenninger. Acknowledgement of special support goes to the staffs of Kent State University's Libraries (James K. Bracken, Dean) and Computer Services (William E. McKinley, Jr, Director). Thanks for support tasks are due to Catherine L. Tisch, of the Institute for Bibliography and Editing.

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CHRONOLOGY

JOSEPH CONRAD'S life may be seen as having several distinct stages: in the Ukraine, in Russian exile and in Austrian Poland before his father's death (1857–69); in Austrian Poland and the South of France as the ward of his maternal uncle (1870–78); in the British merchant service, mainly as a junior officer sailing in the Far East and Australia (1879–early 1890s); after a transitional period (early 1890s), as writer of critical esteem (1895–1914); as acclaimed writer, although perhaps with his greatest work achieved (1915–24). After 1895 the history of his life is essentially the history of his works.

Publication dates given below are those of the English book editions, except for those of the present volume.

1857	December 3	Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (Nałęcz coat-of-arms) born in Berdyczów in the Ukraine to Apollo Korzeniowski and Ewelina (or Ewa), née Bobrowska, Korzeniowska
1862	May	Apollo Korzeniowski, his wife and son forced into exile in Russia
1865	April	Ewa Korzeniowska dies of tuberculosis
1867		Conrad visits Odessa with his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski; perhaps his first view of the sea
1868		Korzeniowski permitted to leave Russia
1869	February	Korzeniowski and Conrad move to Cracow
	May	Korzeniowski dies

1870		Conrad, ward of Bobrowski, begins study with tutor, Adam Pulman
1873	May	Visits Switzerland and northern Italy
1874	October	Takes position in Marseilles with Delestang et Fils, wholesalers and shippers
1875		Apprentice in <i>Mont-Blanc</i> (to Caribbean)
1876–7		In <i>Saint-Antoine</i> (to Caribbean)
1878	late February or early March	Attempts suicide
	April	Leaves Marseilles in British steamer <i>Mavis</i> (Mediterranean waters)
	June	Lands at Lowestoft, Suffolk; first time in England
	July–September	Sails as ordinary seaman in <i>Skimmer of the Sea</i> (North Sea)
1878–80		In <i>Duke of Sutherland</i> (to Sydney), <i>Europa</i> (Mediterranean waters)
1880		Meets G. F. W. Hope and Adolf Krieger
	June	Passes examination for second mate
1880–81		Third mate in <i>Loch Etive</i> (to Sydney)
1881–4		Second mate in <i>Palestine</i> , <i>Riversdale</i> , <i>Narcissus</i> (Eastern seas)
1884	December	Passes examination for first mate
1885–6		Second mate in <i>Tilkhurst</i> (to Singapore and India)
1886		Submits ‘The Black Mate’, perhaps his first story, to <i>Tit-Bits</i> competition
	August	Becomes a British subject

CHRONOLOGY

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	November	Passes examination for master and receives ‘Certificate of Competency’
1886–7		Second mate in <i>Falconhurst</i> (British waters)
1887–8		First mate in <i>Highland Forest</i> , <i>Vidar</i> (Eastern seas)
1888–9		Captain of barque <i>Otago</i> (Bangkok to Australia and Mauritius)
1889	autumn	Begins <i>Almayer’s Folly</i> in London
1890	February–April May–December	In Poland for first time since 1874 In the Congo. Second-in-command, then temporarily captain, of <i>Roi des Belges</i>
1891		Manages warehouse of Barr, Moering in London
1891–3		First mate in <i>Torrens</i> (London and Plymouth to Adelaide)
1893		Meets John Galsworthy and Edward L. (‘Ted’) Sanderson (passengers on <i>Torrens</i>)
	autumn	Visits Bobrowski in the Ukraine
	November	Signs on as second mate in <i>Adowa</i> , which sails only to Rouen and back
1894	January	Signs off <i>Adowa</i> , ending career as seaman
	February	Bobrowski dies
	autumn	Meets Edward Garnett and Jessie George
1895	April	<i>Almayer’s Folly</i>
1896	March	<i>An Outcast of the Islands</i> . Marries Jessie George
	September	Settles in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, after six-month honeymoon in Brittany

1897		Begins friendship with R. B. Cunninghame Graham; meets Henry James and Stephen Crane
	December	<i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i>
1898		Meets Ford Madox (Hueffer) Ford and H. G. Wells
	January	Alfred Borys Leo Conrad born
	April	<i>Tales of Unrest</i>
	October	Moves to Pent Farm, Postling, near Hythe, Kent, sub-let from Ford
1899	February–April	'The Heart of Darkness' in <i>Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine</i>
1900	September	Begins association with literary agent J. B. Pinker
	October	<i>Lord Jim</i>
1901	June	<i>The Inheritors</i> (with Ford)
1902	November	<i>Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories</i>
1903	April	<i>Typhoon and Other Stories</i>
	October	<i>Romance</i> (with Ford)
1904	October	<i>Nostromo</i>
1905	June	<i>One Day More</i> staged in London
1906	August	John Alexander Conrad born
	October	<i>The Mirror of the Sea</i>
1907	September	<i>The Secret Agent</i> . Moves to Someries, Luton, Bedfordshire
1908	August	<i>A Set of Six</i>
1909		Moves to Aldington, Kent
1910		Moves to Capel House, Orlestone, Kent
1911	October	<i>Under Western Eyes</i>
1912	January	<i>Some Reminiscences</i> (as <i>A Personal Record</i> in America)
	October	<i>'Twi'xt Land and Sea</i>

CHRONOLOGY

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1913	September	<i>Chance</i> , with ‘main’ publication date of January 1914
1914	July 25	Departs for Austrian Poland with family; delayed by outbreak of First World War
	November 3	Arrives back in England (via Vienna and Genoa) from Continent
1915	February	<i>Within the Tides</i>
	March	<i>Victory</i>
1917	March	<i>The Shadow-Line</i>
1919	August	<i>The Arrow of Gold</i>
	October	Moves to Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury, Kent
1920	June	<i>The Rescue</i>
1921	January–April	Visits Corsica. Collected editions begin publication in England (Heinemann) and in America (Doubleday)
	February	<i>Notes on Life and Letters</i>
	October 10?	Begins drafting <i>The Rover</i> as short story for a then-planned collection
1922	March	Composition begins in earnest, periods of illness having impeded progress throughout the previous autumn
	mid-July	‘Finishes’ novel, with intensive revision in the following months
	August 21	Signs agreement for publication with Doubleday, Page and Company of New York
	October 27	Typesetting begins at Doubleday’s Garden City works (completed November 8)
	November	<i>The Secret Agent</i> staged in London

1923	February 8	Forwards corrected galley proofs to Doubleday's
	late March–early April	Corrects revise galley proofs
	May–June	Visits America, guest of F. N. Doubleday
	late June	Corrects page proofs
	August 15	<i>The Rover</i> begins serialization in <i>Pictorial Review</i> 's September issue (concludes December issue (15 November))
	October	Doubleday's deluxe limited edition goes through printing
	November 30	Deluxe limited edition of <i>The Rover</i> published in America by Doubleday's
	December 1	Doubleday's trade edition published
	December 3	<i>The Rover</i> published in England by T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd
1924	May	Declines knighthood
	August 3	Dies at Oswalds. Roman Catholic funeral and burial, Canterbury
	September	<i>The Nature of a Crime</i> (with Ford)
	October	<i>The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad</i>
1925	January	<i>Tales of Hearsay</i>
	September	<i>Suspense</i> (unfinished)
1926	March	<i>Last Essays</i>
1928	June	<i>The Sisters</i>

ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTE ON EDITIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

[London is the place of publication unless otherwise specified.]

<i>Catalogue</i>	Walter E. Smith, <i>Joseph Conrad. A Bibliographical Catalogue of His Major First Editions. With Facsimiles of Several Title Pages</i> , n.p., 1979.
CR	<i>Joseph Conrad: The Contemporary Reviews</i> . General Editors Allan H. Simmons, John G. Peters and J. H. Stape, with Richard Niland, Mary Burgoyne and Katherine Isobel Baxter. 4 vols. Cambridge University Press, 2012
<i>Documents</i>	<i>Conrad between the Lines: Documents in a Life</i> , ed. Gene M. Moore, Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad</i> . General Editors Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, with Owen Knowles, Gene M. Moore and J. H. Stape. 9 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1983–2007
<i>Portrait in Letters</i>	<i>A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad</i> , ed. J. H. Stape and Owen Knowles. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996
<i>Register</i>	Gene M. Moore, comp., 'A Descriptive Location Register of Joseph Conrad's Literary Manuscripts', revised edition: http://www.josephconradsociety.org/o2MSS_register.pdf

LOCATIONS OF UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

Berg	Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
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Chapel Hill	Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Colgate	Special Collections, Everett Needham Case Library, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York
Princeton	Rare Books and Special Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey
Yale	Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

NOTE ON EDITIONS

REFERENCES TO Conrad's works are to the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad where these have been published. Otherwise, for the sake of convenience, references are to Dent's Collected Edition, 1946–55, whose pagination is identical with that of the various 'editions' published by Doubleday's throughout the 1920s. References to the Cambridge Edition take the following form: title (year of publication), whereas publication dates are not provided for citations from Dent's Collected Edition.

Citations from critical and other works are identified by author, title and date only.

INTRODUCTION

BEGUN AS A short story in October 1921, two months before Conrad's sixty-fourth birthday, *The Rover* (1923) turned out to be the writer's last completed novel. After a slow beginning plagued by bouts of ill health, Conrad discovered, as had happened several times in his career, that his subject invited more expansive treatment. The short story about an ageing French seaman returning 'home' after a lifetime of adventure and vicissitude thus evolved into a short novel, and then into a full-length one. Once Conrad got into his stride, he completed it rapidly, by dictation, between January and mid-July 1922. For it, he laid aside his work-in-hand, *Suspense* (1925), with which he was encountering difficulties and which would remain unfinished upon his death. Escaping a troubled work that had been on his desk for some time in favour of a much smaller canvas must have had immediate appeal. It also promised a consolidation of effort: the new story (*The Rover*) draws upon roughly the same historical epoch as *Suspense* – the French Revolution and Napoleonic period – eras that Conrad had read about widely and mined for his short stories 'The Duel' (1908) and 'The Warrior's Soul' (1917).

The valedictory mood announced in *The Rover*'s epigraph – 'Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas, / Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please', from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590/1596) – has a special relevance and even poignancy. *The Rover*'s title character, Peyrol, returning at the age of fifty-eight to a homeland from which he has been absent since adolescence, is forced to reflect upon his distant past and to adapt to radically changed times just when he begins to discover in himself a need for tranquillity and rootedness. For Conrad, *The Rover* involved no less an inward turn and a taking stock of his life's achievements as he recreated the scenes and moods of his youth in the South of France. But the novel's note of recollection and elegy also chimes with more recent events that had transformed Europe and touched him personally. As much as it is concerned with French and British politics and mores of a century before, *The Rover* explores the

contemporary mood of reconciliation and calm following upon the great European war recently ended after four tumultuous years, a conflict that had resulted in political reconfigurations across the Continent, much as had happened after the Revolution of 1789 and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The fall of old empires, the assassination of crowned heads, the terrors and instability of mob rule, the rise of modern dictatorships, the return home of men who had witnessed – and participated in – bloodshed and horrors had a deep resonance for Conrad and his contemporaries at a time when age-old traditions and values were being overturned in a headlong rush towards modernity.

Declining to offer a dramatic, full-colour portrait of the French Revolution or stirring moments of it, as had two writers he admired – Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and Anatole France in *Les dieux ont soif* (*The Gods Are Athirst*) (1912) – in *The Rover* Conrad works on a small domestic scale and in chiaroscuro. He concentrates not upon great events in the wide world but, instead, on their psychological aftereffects upon a small cast of representative characters settled on a remote peninsula at France's southeastern tip. Tightly focussed in its action, the novel, despite its Mediterranean setting, achieves a restraint and intimacy of tone resembling the hush that comes to a battlefield when the swords have been returned to their scabbards and the guns have fallen silent.

ORIGINS

APART FROM THE posthumous *Tales of Hearsay* and *Suspense* (1925), *The Rover* is unique in the writer's canon in not featuring an 'Author's Note'. Conrad had written these for his earlier novels and by contractual obligation had supplied them for his works published in 1920–1 in America as Doubleday, Page's 'Sun-Dial' Edition and in Britain as William Heinemann's Collected Edition. Eschewing the lengthy and sometimes technical disquisitions that Henry James had supplied to his 'New York' edition (1907–9), Conrad provided his readers with brief *causeries*: intimate 'chats' that discussed a given work's origins and sources, and often highlighted its autobiographical connections. He intended to write such an introduction to this novel as well, promising his literary agent that 'a Preface . . . will be some day written

for “The Rover”.¹ His death prevented this, but the absence of a foreword does not impede a discussion of the novel’s genesis, which can be constructed from scattered statements in Conrad’s correspondence as well as from hints found in his activities and interests during the period of the work’s conception and writing.

The Rover’s origins are located in a practical situation: making slow headway with *Suspense*, first thought of as far back as 1912 and already picked at for more than two years,² Conrad had in hand four stories – ‘Prince Roman’ (1911), ‘The Tale’ (1917), ‘The Warrior’s Soul’ (1917) and ‘The Black Mate’ (1908) – that, with a fifth, would make a collection of acceptable length. A volume of tales would not only yield financial rewards but also meet a growing pressure to have Conrad’s name reappear in fiction lists – and before a fickle public – in 1922. His latest novel, *The Rescue*, had appeared almost two years earlier, in May 1920. (The publication in February 1921 of *Notes on Life and Letters*, a collection of his essays, was directed at an elite segment of the book-buying public.) As it turned out, however, *The Rover*’s unplanned growth put paid to plans for a hastily compiled volume. The other four stories would be published posthumously, under the title *Tales of Hearsay* (1925). And as some reviewers noted, a three-year gap yawned between *The Rescue* and *The Rover*.

Eager to lay aside *Suspense*, Conrad believed that he would be able to write to order – a rare and hard-won feat throughout his career. He might have seen a shortcut of sorts: the period of the new story and the languishing novel overlapped. Napoleon is a constant presence in the background of *Suspense* – in effect, its absent main character – whilst in *The Rover*, the Corsican parvenu’s career from common soldier to emperor is passingly alluded to, providing part of the novel’s temporal framework. Moreover, *Suspense* features a coastal Mediterranean setting, a romantic liaison, a foreigner adapting to novel cultural conditions, cameo appearances by historical figures, political machinations in the great world that have an impact upon the small one, and trusty sea dogs engaged in dangerous secretive missions for political ends. As far as Conrad had completed it, *Suspense* concludes with a white-haired seaman ‘whose last bit of work was to steer a boat and strange to think perhaps it has been done for Italy’ (192.7–8), a character

¹ Conrad to Eric S. Pinker, 11 October 1923 (*Letters*, VIII, 192).

² For the complicated history of its composition, see ‘The Text’, *Suspense*, ed. Gene M. Moore (2011), pp. 203–24.

indebted to Peyrol, who, at the end of *The Rover*, lays down his life for his country in a final, daring feat of seamanship. (This part of *Suspense* was written *after* Conrad had completed *The Rover*, but how much of *Suspense* had been plotted when Conrad began *The Rover* is unknown and leaves open the possibility of intertextual influence.) Thus, if not quite a shard from the novel then in progress, the new story none the less shares several elements with it, despite divergences in method, plotting, style and characterization.

Conrad's dating of *The Rover's* beginning – an extant manuscript page gives this as 'October 10th 1921' – does not survive scrutiny.¹ But whatever the specific date on which he began composition, he was, more importantly, engaged in correcting proofs for a private printing of his stage adaptation (undertaken in late 1919) of *The Secret Agent*, a task that led him to reflect back to the writing of that novel in 1906–7, part of which time he and his family had spent at Montpellier and Geneva. Reshaping this older work seems to have had implications for the story beginning to exercise him: adaptation involved crafting dialogue (not always a strong point in his fiction) out of narrative, and considering issues of scene and pace that would also feature significantly in *The Rover's* opening chapters. There are also deeper shared links to this earlier work: the anarchist Ossipon's predatory sexual attitude towards Winnie Verloc is mirrored in the coerced relationship between the sans-culotte Scevola and the traumatized Arlette; Stevie Verloc's mental insecurity and psychological vulnerability are echoed in Arlette's fragile mental condition; and the pervasive atmosphere of secrecy and shadowy intrigue – individual, societal and political, the latter permeating *Suspense* as well – also plays a major role in *The Rover*. Other characters besides Peyrol have questionable pasts, buried secrets (literally, in the case of the old rover), hidden histories and only partly tellable tales – Catherine's or the abbé's, for instance. Thus, repression, concealment and suppression act as central thematic and plot elements in *The Secret Agent* and *The Rover*, to say nothing of their shared concern with the fragility of the body politic.

Conrad's reading at this time also suggests a return to earlier moods and ideas, and to an autobiographical impulse: shortly after he first mentions *The Rover* in correspondence, he records reading *Memories and Notes of Persons and Places, 1852–1912* (1921) by his old friend the art critic and art historian Sir Sidney Colvin (1845–1927). These

¹ See 'The Text: An Essay', p. 240.

essays in autobiography cover a wide sweep of time, recounting Colvin's friendships with several Victorian artists and literary figures, including Edward Burne-Jones, Robert Louis Stevenson and George Eliot; and their final chapter relates rambles on the Brittany coast. Conrad, who found reading the volume 'one continuous delight', registered his pleasure in terms that presage the aim of some of his writing in *The Rover*: 'These detached pages have a singularly charming oneness of atmosphere – a touching serenity in their clear light, and a classical simplicity of suggestive lines in portraiture and landscape which is most satisfying to one's tastes and one's emotions.'¹ The emphasis on the role of simplicity and clarity is revealing: self-consciously artless, Colvin managed in workaday prose to convey aspects of multifaceted public figures, while he remains both at centre stage and tastefully on the sidelines, aware that his audience's interest lies not in him, but in the men and women whom he had known. This method of indirection, which suited Colvin well, has consequences for the delicate transmutation of Conrad's autobiography in *The Rover*, with the events and moods of his experience refracted under several fictional guises.

While witnessing his distinguished friend engaged in retrospection, Conrad was also urged by a combination of circumstances to look back upon his past life at sea. His friend the artist and principal of the Royal College of Art, William Rothenstein (1872–1945), was influential in proposing a reissue of *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906) illustrated by the paintings of the marine and landscape artist (Herbert Barnard) John Everett (1876–1949). Trained at London's Slade School of Fine Art and at the Académie Julian in Paris, Everett had also spent time at sea as a crew member on long-distance sailing ships, and honed his observational skills during excursions along the British coast in recreational craft. Shown photographs of Everett's work by Rothenstein, Conrad became excited by the prospect of joint publication, going so far as to confess that his 'enthusiasm for the idea is practically unbounded'.² Discussions with Methuen's, the book's publisher, with Everett and with J. B. Pinker, Conrad's literary agent, extended over several months. Nothing came of this project, but it arguably influences the story Conrad had just begun, particularly its opening scenes, in which scenery and interior mood reflect each other.

¹ Conrad to Sir Sidney Colvin, 1 November 1921 (*Letters*, VII, 362, 363).

² Conrad to William Rothenstein, 17 November 1921 (*Letters*, VII, 372).

The novel's emphasis on visualization throughout derives from an intense concern with the pictorial, notably with landscape.

Conrad's encounter with the Corsican and Irish landscape paintings of A(lice) S(arah) Kinkead (1871–1926) further encouraged this interest. He and his wife Jessie (née George) had befriended Kinkead during their stay in Corsica earlier in the year (1921), and, on Kinkead's request, Conrad wrote an introductory note to the catalogue of her November–December exhibition at London's United Arts Gallery.¹ Kinkead's attempts to capture the colours and moods of the Mediterranean's geography at a crucial moment in the new story's development must have made an impression. They stimulated Conrad to recall not only his holidays on Corsica in early 1921, but, also to look back upon the scenes of a more distant past.

The work of these two painters evoked contrasting visual impressions. Everett's marine sketches and pictures, both oil and pastel, rely upon a modernist hyper-realism for effect: clean lines, bold primary colours, or, in storm scenes, graded shades and a dramatic intensity. His other work has an almost microscopic focus upon details. By contrast, Kinkead's landscapes – traditional in their choice of subject and more conventional technically – are a matter of blurry pastels and smoothed-out soft edges. If not formally impressionist in technique, their tendency to vagueness and suggestiveness of atmosphere is indebted to the movement that dominated late-nineteenth-century art and depended upon revisiting known scenes from new perspectives.

Conrad's encounter with the work of these painters when he began to compose *The Rover*, and was still working out his method for it, is a case of happenstance. By this point in his career, his reputation for verbal scene painting was well established, indeed synonymous with his name. None the less, even if it cannot be measured with precision upon a writer determined 'before all, to make you *see*',² the impact of these artists can be identified. Not only are the novel's leisurely opening chapters partly a matter of setting a scene visually – the land's geographic features take on a crucial role in the lives of the characters – but its quiet close of threnody is also painterly in impulse. The

¹ 'Foreword to *Landscapes of Corsica and Ireland* by A. S. Kinkead', *Last Essays*, ed. Harold Ray Stevens and J. H. Stape (2010), pp. 179–80. For a discussion of Kinkead's life and career, see Susan Jones, 'Alice Kinkead and the Conrads', *The Conradian*, 33, no. 1 (2008), 103–18.

² 'Preface', *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, ed. Allan H. Simmons (2017), p. 7.16.

blue Mediterranean, ‘the marvellous purity of the sunset sky’,¹ a few clouds as well as the companionless mulberry tree see Conrad relying upon mixed media – visual memories almost cinematically rendered in close-up and distance, evocative words and rhythmic inflections – to achieve a multidimensional sense of calm and of the construction of a new world upon the sorrows and tribulations of the old.

Valedictory in mood, *The Rover* is one of several testamentary acts of Conrad’s final years. In 1920, he revealed that collecting his essays in volume form was part of ‘a process of tidying up’.² The novel continues this retrospective course. As Conrad confessed to his old friend the writer John Galsworthy, ‘I have wanted for a long time to do a seaman’s “return” (before my own departure) and this seemed a possible peg to hang it on.’³ Imprecise about the period when he felt this impulse – Conrad had already returned to the sea and to recollections of his past in both *Chance* (1914) and *The Shadow-Line* (1917) – the statement is none the less revelatory. It suggests that time was closing in upon him, a theme that he would also broach with the novelist Arnold Bennett upon publication of *The Rover*: ‘I feel (why conceal it?) that twilight lies already on these pages.’⁴

In *The Rover*, the ‘seaman’s return’ takes various shapes: it revives youthful memories as well as deep concerns and emotions that had stirred Conrad, and it pays homage to the age-old traditions of the sea that had shaped his personality. Long suffering from ill health and increasingly aware of his mortality, in his last completed novel Conrad looks back upon, and gives fictional form to, the active life he had led as a young man and the scenes and atmosphere of the period when he became a professional seaman, long before he took up the pen as a means of earning his livelihood. The turn towards autobiography, and away from the strictly historical that characterizes *Suspense*, was a sharp one: apart from the figure of Attilio, who recalls Dominique Cervoni, a Corsican friend from Conrad’s Marseilles days,⁵ *Suspense* is ‘bookish’. Its characters and situations are cobbled out of reading in the Napoleonic period and inspired not by incidents or people in the writer’s life but by his intellectual interests. Leaving the stumbling

¹ P. 215.33–34. Subsequent references to the text of the present edition appear in round brackets.

² ‘Author’s Note’, *Notes on Life and Letters*, ed. J. H. Stape (2004), p. 3.4–5.

³ Conrad to John Galsworthy, 22 February 1924 (*Letters*, VIII, 318).

⁴ Conrad to Arnold Bennett, 5 December 1923 (*Letters*, VIII, 240).

⁵ See pp. xli–xlii below for a discussion of this individual.

Suspense behind and turning inward for his materials, Conrad found his creative energies renewed.

The choice of an ageing protagonist in *Peyrol* – after chapter III he is Conrad's own age of sixty-four – and of a younger mirror image in the naval officer Eugène Réal suits this personal exploration in several ways. The 'twilight' that Conrad perceived urged him not only to assess his past, but also to look ahead to a time he would not see, and to consider his legacy. Whereas *Peyrol* faces the twofold task of understanding himself and coming to terms with his varied life as it moves towards its close, Réal represents continuity and the future. Discovered and donated to France at large (the exact government department is unnamed), *Peyrol*'s buried loot represents a material legacy that influences the nation, even if only in a small way. By contrast, his preservation of Réal's life is a spiritual legacy, not only with personal resonances but also having an effect upon the wider community: on retiring from active service after the Battle of Trafalgar, Réal continues his engagement in the body politic by becoming mayor of his commune, a symbol of the return to national solidarity and order after self-division, violent strife, destruction and lawlessness.

Not strictly concerned with politics, a subject hinted at in the backdrop rather than developed in the foreground, and unlike the major works of Conrad's middle period – *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911) – *The Rover* none the less originates in a deep interest in political ideas, including scepticism about violence as a means of political change. It continues an exploration of tangled ideological threads that stretched throughout Conrad's career; announced in his first novels, it culminated, in its first phase, in the handling of political themes in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. Far from 'turning his back on the problems of the present',¹ in *The Rover* Conrad deals with them indirectly and discreetly, with the novel also stemming from his and his audience's concern with contemporary issues that, however geographically and temporally displaced, are both recognizable and resonant. A perceptive contemporary reviewer saw through these displacements, suggesting that one of *The Rover*'s main interests was its 'extremely subtle description of the after-effects of Revolution', with Arlette, Catherine, Scevola and Réal embodying 'types of modern Russians recovering slowly from a surfeit of horrors'.²

¹ Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Conrad* (1982), p. 41.

² *Life and Letters*, January 1924, 127 (*CR*, IV, 315).

This insightful allusion to the 1917 Russian Revolution as a re-enactment of the Terror – and with the French Revolution itself a template for all modern revolutions – might be extended. The novel's plot draws upon contemporary conditions still closer to home: adjusting to the painful losses she had suffered during the First World War, Great Britain in the 1920s was undergoing rapid social, political and economic changes following upon the Treaty of Versailles (1919). Portrayed on the novel's surface, these tensions also function as a palimpsest whereby contemporary conditions are recalled in those of the past. Arlette's psychological state evokes that of the men who returned home shell-shocked, including Conrad's elder son, Borys (1898–1978). Enthusiastic about the war's outbreak and enlisting in the Army Service Corps as soon as he was old enough to do so, Borys Conrad suffered a chlorine gas attack along the Menin-Cambrai road in October 1918. Although his physical recovery was quick, his mental state remained shaky for some time. He had difficulties securing employment upon his return home, and his reintegration into civilian life was difficult. His erratic, sometimes feckless, behaviour troubled his parents and caused tensions in the family for several years after he was invalided out of the army.¹

To see this motif in merely personal terms is, however, to neglect the wider, and for the novel more important, national situation. Tens of thousands of men had returned home psychologically damaged: in the decade after the war's end, nearly 115,000 of them applied for pensions related to shell-shock.² The 'Tommy's' also returned to face precarious employment prospects in an unrecognizable, substantially feminized labour market, as well as altered domestic situations. Forced to cope with high inflation as the war's economic cost took its toll on average lives, the entire nation experienced labour unrest, aggravated class tensions and uncertainty as to its future direction. There was even a latent threat of political upheaval and violence as some three million men were reintegrated into a traumatized national fabric.

Others who had been in active service suffered physical dismemberment, and the maimed and impoverished could be seen wandering the country's streets, a daily reminder of the conflict recalled in

¹ J. H. Stape, *The Several Lives of Joseph Conrad* (2007), ch. 8 and 9.

² Martin Bock, 'Disease and Medicine', *Joseph Conrad in Context*, ed. Allan H. Simmons (2014), p. 128.

The Rover by the nameless ‘cripple of the Madrague’ (215.3) and the handicapped Michel, whose physical condition marginalizes them. A friendless man until Peyrol involves him in the tartane’s (symbolic) restoration, Michel’s thematic function is to emphasize the essential need for sympathy, understanding and purpose. Those were precisely the conditions faced by the men who had returned to a ‘home’ that had become unfamiliar, as erstwhile rigid social barriers began to crack and then collapse. The novel reflects this reality in its changing terms of address, with the *citoyen* of Revolutionary fervour replaced by the age-old *monsieur*, and the return to pre-Revolutionary mores and modes of behaviour. ‘Normality’ eventually reasserts itself over turbulence as the Gregorian calendar replaces the Revolutionary one, and as the once-banned clergy reopen the churches that political fanaticism had vandalized and closed.

Resisting these changes, the sans-culotte Scevola represents a modern type: the righteous idealist wedded to violence in service of a political cause, and already represented in Conrad’s canon by the Professor in *The Secret Agent*. Partly derived from late-nineteenth-century anarchist movements, the Professor has his prototype in the ideologues of the Terror. Like Scevola, this prototype embodies an atavistic, repressed irrationality and violence, associated with night, that on occasion explodes to dominate the rule of day. A sociopathic, even psychopathic, fanatic, Scevola personifies the ‘imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions’.¹ Although Conrad’s characterization refers to supporters of the Bolshevik programme for the end of tsarist Russia, he and his readers had also witnessed firsthand the work required to manufacture the patriotism required to fuel and, later, to sustain a prolonged war effort. (Conrad himself had been commissioned to write outright propaganda for the Admiralty in his (posthumous) essay ‘The Unlighted Coast’ (1925).) He could cast his memories farther back to his parents’ political activism, which, whatever its noble intent, left him an orphan at the age of eleven and lacked any practical result until some half-century after their premature deaths, when his cultural homeland, Poland, re-emerged on the map of

¹ ‘Author’s Note’, *Under Western Eyes*, ed. Roger Osborne and Paul Eggert (2013), p. 7.13–17.

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Europe as an independent nation-state in the aftermath of the First World War.

Conrad's long-standing interest in political thought was no doubt inflected during the months of *The Rover's* composition by Britain's changing political landscape, with the Labour Party making gains that led to the election of a hung Parliament within a month of the novel's publication. On the way to this dramatic shift in alliances and social compacts, old ways of thinking were altering. Some elements in the Labour Party drew their inspiration directly from events in Russia, with recognition of the Soviet government high on the party's agenda. (Bolshevism was discussed before and during the electoral campaign.) More distant, but still resonant, was the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–21, on which Conrad commented: 'I confess to some little gratification at the thought that the unbroken Polish front keeps Bolshevism off and that apparently the re-born State has one heart and one soul, one indomitable will, from the poorest peasant to the highest magnate.'¹ His antipathy to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its bloody aftermath is unsurprising: cynical about utopian projects, Conrad reinvigorates ideas that he had treated in his earlier fiction; and the firebrand Scevola dramatizes on a small scale the political tensions current not only on the Continent but also debated in Britain in the daily press and populist movements born in the war's wake. Set in a world both imagined and historical, *The Rover* emerges from, and speaks to, its time.

SOURCES

AS USUAL IN constructing his fictions, Conrad drew upon variegated sources for *The Rover*. His experience in the French Merchant Service during the late 1870s; his intermittent life in Marseilles and aboard ships from 1874 to 1878; learned accounts of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era and of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century British Navy; and the recent end of the Great War, the peace concluded in its wake and the mood of international and national reconciliation – all constitute the novel's main sources. Most of these lie in a distant background, having been assimilated and perhaps even consciously concealed. And breaking from

¹ Conrad to John Quinn, 2 March 1920 (*Letters*, VII, 40).

a habitual practice in much of his early fiction, in *The Rover* Conrad eschews an allusive literary texture in order to convey, in simple, sometimes even spare prose, an illusion of historical and quotidian reality.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

CONTRARY TO WHAT might be expected of a historical novel – a category in which he declined to place it¹ – *The Rover* draws upon Conrad's life in several important ways. Its geographical locale and atmosphere are recreated from his time in the South of France and on the Mediterranean coast. Characters and themes derive from his youthful experience in Marseilles as well as from a reacquaintance with Mediterranean culture closer to the time of the novel's writing and, more distantly, from his family background in a part of continental Europe characterized by ardent patriotism and long bedevilled by political divisions punctuated by cycles of violence and repression.

Conrad's arrival in Marseilles in November 1874, about a month before his seventeenth birthday, proved a turning point in his life. Over the next four years he spent more than twenty months in the city, interrupted by voyages to the French Antilles. On arriving in France's most important port with his boyhood dreams of a career at sea soon to be fulfilled, he was exposed to a cosmopolitan culture and southern temperament vastly different from the provincial Cracow and politically troubled Austrian Poland that he had left behind.² Without engaging in facile psychology, it is none the less tempting to see Conrad's family background and childhood experience as influencing the novel's concern with the condition of an orphanhood whose origins lie in chaotic political events. His father, Apollo Korzeniowski (1820–69), a playwright, translator, poet and activist in the cause of Polish independence, suffered permanent damage to his health as the result of his condemnation to a harsh internal exile in northern Russia. Conrad's mother, Ewa Korzeniowska (1831–65), likewise died prematurely as the result of her allegiance to the independence movement.

¹ See Appendix B, p. 502.

² For a discussion of Marseilles during Conrad's time in the city, see Franciszek Ziejka, 'Conrad's Marseilles', *Yearbook of Conrad Studies*, 7 (2012), 51–67.

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Conrad's orphanhood is mirrored in that of Arlette and Réal, both of whom have lost their parents in the bloodletting of the Revolution, Arlette's because of their loyalty to the *Ancien Régime* and opposition to the new Revolutionary state, and Réal's as aristocrats and hence de facto enemies. Peyrol – at times a patent surrogate for Conrad himself – seemingly has no father (a factor in his symbolic status as a child of France, as Razumov is the son of all Russia in *Under Western Eyes*), and he loses his impoverished mother on the cusp of adolescence. After her death, he fends for himself in the wide world, finding a new community and nation in the sea, as did the young Conrad upon arriving in Marseilles. And like Conrad, Peyrol finds adoptive fathers who mentor him, initiate him into an age-old craft and influence his outlook on life.

Conrad's adoptive father figure about whom most is known – and that rather little – was Dominique-André ('Dumenicu') Cervoni (1834–90), a sailor from Luri in northern Corsica. He and Conrad not only sailed to the French Caribbean together for the small shipping firm of Delestang et Fils, but also in local craft. According to Conrad's unreliable accounts of this period of his life, they were involved in smuggling and gun-running off the French and Spanish coasts in the cause of Carlos de Borbón (1848–1909), Duke of Madrid and pretender to the Spanish throne as Carlos VII, a cause moribund if not already dead when Conrad alighted from his train in Marseilles.¹ Whether imaginary or embroidered, in the way of yarning sailors or self-aggrandizing young men, these escapades find their echo in Peyrol's 'lawless' life as a pirate and 'Brother of the Coast'.

Cervoni, 'this modern and unlawful wanderer with his own legend of loves, dangers, and bloodshed',² not only contributes to the novel some of Peyrol's colourful past, but also influences the showy masculinity of the title character of *Nostromo* (1904) and of Attilio in *Suspense* (1925). He also serves as a 'character' under his own name (Anglicized as 'Dominic') in *The Arrow of Gold* (1919) and in

¹ The most vexed period in Conradian biography, these years have been variously interpreted. Romanticized versions are offered by Jerry Allen's pioneering, but sometimes fanciful *The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad* (1965), and by Claudine Lesage's *La maison de Thérèse: Joseph Conrad, les années françaises, 1874–1878* (1992). The documented facts are available in Hans van Marle, 'Young Ulysses Ashore: On the Trail of Konrad Korzeniowski in Marseilles', *L'Époque Conradianne* (1976), 23–34, and 'Lawful and Lawless: Young Korzeniowski's Adventures in the Caribbean', *L'Époque Conradianne* (1991), 91–113.

² *The Mirror of the Sea*, p. 163.

‘The *Tremolino*’ section of *The Mirror of the Sea*. The latter semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional sketch concludes with a nostalgic farewell to him that evokes Tiresias’ prophecy that Ulysses’ life will end in a land far from his own and amongst strangers to whom the sea is unknown (*The Odyssey*, Book XI). The prediction foretells Peyrol’s destiny and provides a likely source for his cudgel, which substitutes for the oar that Ulysses carries with him as an emblem of his fate:

Dominic Cervoni takes his place in my memory by the side of the legendary wanderer on the sea of marvels and terrors, by the side of the fatal and impious adventurer, to whom the evoked shade of the soothsayer predicted a journey inland with an oar on his shoulder, till he met men who had never set eyes on ships and oars. It seems to me I can see them side by side in the twilight of an arid land, the unfortunate possessors of the secret lore of the sea, bearing the emblem of their hard calling on their shoulders, surrounded by silent and curious men [...]¹

Conrad’s memories of Cervoni were refreshed by his sojourn in Ajaccio, where he and his wife stayed for some two months (from about 30 January to 7 April 1921), with *Suspense* intending to make progress on, and do further reading for, *Suspense*.² On their way to the island of Napoleon’s birth, they spent a few days in Marseilles and, on their return journey, a night in Toulon, from whence they could see the Giens Peninsula and its adjacent small islands, the setting for much of *The Rover*.³ It has been speculated that Conrad might have returned to Toulon and also visited the Giens Peninsula in February or March during his stay on Corsica. But a special trip, contrary to the contentions of some critics,⁴ seems unlikely: it is unmentioned in correspondence and could not have been made with *The Rover* in mind, since the story would not be envisaged until October 1921.

The other real-life figures that contribute to the making of Peyrol prove elusive: like the young Peyrol, Conrad found himself initiated into the life and rituals of the sea by a group of men of various ages and

¹ Ibid., p. 183.

² For a detailed account of this working holiday, see Maddalena Rodriguez-Antoniotti, *Bleu Conrad, le destin méditerranéen de Joseph Conrad* (2007).

³ See Owen Knowles, *A Conrad Chronology*, 2nd edn (2014), p. 163; and Hans van Marle to Owen Knowles, 9 May 1988, ‘Selected Letters, 1959–2000’, ed. Gene M. Moore, *The Conradian*, 30, no. 2 (2005), 100–1.

⁴ See Claudine Lesage, ‘A Trip to Giens: An Imaginary Journey into Fiction’, *Conrad’s Cities: Essays for Hans van Marle*, ed. Gene M. Moore (1992), pp. 255–68 (255), following René Chalupt, *Ravel au miroir de ses lettres* (1956), pp. 195–6.

experience. Apart from general reading in French history, specific sources are unknown for Réal or for Scevola Bron, with Conrad drawing on the Abbé Augustin Barruel's polemic *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797–9), a copy of which he owned,¹ for the atmosphere of the political and ideological extremism that Scevola embodies.

Arlette – who significantly bears no surname – has more immediate autobiographical origins in Jane (née Foster) Anderson (1888–1972; later Marquesa de Cienfuegos), an attractive young American journalist from Atlanta, Georgia, unhappily married to the composer Deems Taylor when she met Conrad in early 1916.² Coming to England to cover the war, the young American found work as a freelance for the *Daily Mail* – and diversion as a self-promoter and practised charmer, having drawn to herself the attentions of its influential and well-to-do founder-owner, Alfred Harmsworth, Viscount Northcliffe. A controversial figure in Conradian biography – wild claims have been made about the nature and intensity of her relationship with the writer – Anderson was later an enthusiastic supporter of Generalissimo Francisco Franco's fascists in Spain, and broadcast propaganda for the Nazis during the Second World War.³ She adopted the Conrad family, as it were, flirting not only with Conrad but also dazzling his elder son (as Arlette attracts the attention of both 'Papa Peyrol' (133.30) and the younger Réal). All the while, she established an uneasy relationship with Jessie Conrad, who served partly as a surrogate mother, a relationship that may have provided Conrad with elements for the psychological ties binding Catherine and Arlette. However, in the end, Anderson, known for her ebullience, contributes little to the introverted and psychologically damaged Arlette. Her brief presence in the Conrad household is reflected only obliquely in this novel, and more directly in the character Doña Rita de Lastaola, the Basque femme fatale of *The Arrow of Gold*.

¹ Messrs Hodgson & Company, *A Catalogue of the Books, MSS., and Corrected Typescripts from the Library of the Late Joseph Conrad* (1925), p. 9.

² See John Halversen and Ian Watt, 'Notes on Jane Anderson, 1955–1990', *Conradiana*, 23 (1991), 59–87; and James A. Pegoletti, *Deems Taylor: A Biography* (2003).

³ John Carver Edwards, *Berlin Calling: American Broadcasters in Service to the Third Reich* (1991). See also Donald E. Wilkes, Jr, 'Jane Anderson: The Nazi Georgia Peach', *Athens Observer*, 18 May 1995, p. 5; 25 May 1995, p. 5A; 1 June 1995, p. 4A.

LITERARY AND HISTORICAL SOURCES

THE LITERARY SOURCES in *The Rover* are deeply rooted, providing structural and overarching elements rather than local and specific ones, as is often the case in Conrad's writings. The recourse to the founding traditions of European literature – myth, legend, fairy-tale and generic comedy – suits a work concerned with the grand sweep of history as well as origins and endings.

The novel's principal literary source is the *nostos*, the homecoming after wandering and vicissitude, a literary tradition deriving from Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*.¹ A roving Ulysses in late-eighteenth-century dress, Peyrol returns to a France self-divided and still in a state of distress after the Reign of Terror (1793–4), a period much more tumultuous than the fading fervour he meets with on arriving in Toulon in 1796. The memories of political fanaticism and the violence it occasioned still linger, affecting every character in the novel. No faithful Penelope awaits Peyrol, not even France herself; only the landscape of her extreme southern tip offers him a reference point after a prolonged absence from his culture and homeland. In borrowing this trope to structure *The Rover*, Conrad returns to the origins of a once commonly held European literary culture, a foundational point for cultural identity and shared values.

Much like Ulysses coming home to Ithaca, Peyrol returns to a France that no longer quite exists, just as he himself has been altered by his experiences and shaped by contact with the strangers encountered during long years of voyaging. Extending the Homeric *nostos*, Conrad – whose nickname in Marseilles was 'Ulysses'² – sets out to explore the returnee's fraught task of reintegration. As Tiresias predicts, Ulysses' homecoming will be complicated by self-awareness and alienation from things once natural and instinctive – and ultimately prove impermanent. Like Ulysses, Peyrol can only hope to return to the scenes of his past in part. Thus, he symbolically disembarks in France with a gift – the prize ship entrusted to his professional care and skill – as well as with a burden: the heavy money belt concealing foreign coins that hinders his agility. The belt – possibly indebted to Victor Hugo's *Les travailleurs de la mer* (1866), which Conrad had read

¹ For a critical discussion, see Andrzej Busza, 'The Rover: Conrad's *Nostos*', *The Ugo Mursia Memorial Lectures, Second Series*, ed. Mario Curreli (2005), pp. 31–41.

² Muirhead Bone, 'Joseph Conrad – A Modern Ulysses', *Living Age*, 13 September 1924, p. 553.

as a boy – acts as the objective correlative of an uneasy, culturally disparate personality that now sets him apart from his kind as well as from his earlier, innocent self. Conrad borrows from Homer in having Peyrol, like Ulysses, set out once more, returning to the sea and fulfilling the final terms of Tiresias' prophecy: 'As for yourself, death shall come to you from the sea, and your life shall ebb away very gently when you are full of years and peace of mind, and your people shall bless you.'¹

A more contemporary influence on the Peyrol of the novel's opening chapters might derive from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), a popular pirate tale for boys. The arrival of the roustabout 'Billy' Bones to settle at a wayside inn with his mysterious sea chest containing coins 'of all countries and sizes – doubloons, and louis d'ors, and guineas, and pieces of eight, and I know not what besides' (Pt 1, ch. 4) and his haunting of the cliffs near the sea are echoed in Peyrol's arrival at Escampobar, with his concealed money belt of 'mixed coins, gold mohurs, Dutch ducats, Spanish pieces, English guineas' (13.38–39) and his fascination with the nearby cove and its abandoned tartane. The title character's literary ancestry also lies in the sea novels of Captain Frederick Marryat and James Fenimore Cooper that Conrad had read in boyhood. A stereotype of the 'old salt', Long Tom Coffin of Cooper's historical novel *The Pilot* (1824), whom Conrad characterized as 'a monumental seaman with the individuality of life',² almost certainly influences the portrait of Peyrol and, even more, his end. Long Tom heroically chooses his death, going down with his beloved ship in a storm during an intense struggle pitting an American privateer against British naval forces during the American Revolution.

Conrad also relies upon age-old myth and legend to portray the reintegrative task he assigns to Arlette, no less emblematic a figure than Peyrol and with roots equally deep, if not quite as ancient, in common European culture. The legend reanimated in the novel is that of 'The Sleeping Beauty', which limns the emergence from enchanted slumber to consciousness and adulthood through love. Most commonly known in the literary version, based on folklore and popularized by Charles Perrault – 'La Belle au bois dormant' ('The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood') from *Histoires ou contes du temps*

¹ *The Odyssey*, XI, 118 (trans. Samuel Butler (1900)).

² 'Tales of the Sea' (1898), *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 48.18–19.

passé or *Les contes de ma mère l'Oye* (1697) – the story has precedents in the fourteenth-century French prose romance *Perceforest* and in Giambattista Basile's 'Sole, Luna, e Talia' in his *Pentamerone* (1634). Conrad not only naturalizes and historicizes his borrowed materials, but also transforms and expands them by making Lieutenant Réal an exact double of the 'Sleeping Beauty' figure, whose long enchanted slumber also ends with a symbolic breath-giving kiss (in mythical terms, a return from death and the tomb), and by extending this awakening to France herself in the novel's coda.

The borrowing from folkloric motifs is supplemented by other literary sources, with Arlette also fashioned out of the Romantic period's fascination with somnambulism and, more generally, with non-rational and liminal states of consciousness. Again, specific sources prove elusive. Arlette as the suffering heroine emerges, as Peyrol does in part, from long-standing traditions and beliefs. She is not a somnambulist proper (like Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth), but her night-wanderings, induced by what is now called post-traumatic stress syndrome, indicate a mind at odds with itself and point to a riven, restless personality longing for healing and psychic wholeness. Her ancestry can also be traced to the long line of heroine-victim figures who, pushed into extreme dissociation, experience full-blown madness, like Lucy Ashton of Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) and Gaetano Donizetti's operatic version of her in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), to which Conrad alludes in *Nostromo* and *A Personal Record*; and Mrs Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Among figures that contribute to her in a general way are Laura Fairlie, the titular heroine of Wilkie Collins's sensation novel *The Woman in White* (1859); and Vincenzo Bellini's Amina, the title character of his *La Sonnambula* ('The Sleepwalker', 1831), an *opera semi-seria* that, like *Lucia di Lammermoor*, figured in the repertoire (sung in French) when Conrad was in Marseilles, as did Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet* (1868), featuring another *femme fragile* in the character of Ophélie.¹

The historical sources that Conrad relied upon for his knowledge of the French Revolution and early nineteenth-century British and French naval history have been so assimilated as, on the whole, to be

¹ Frank Baldanza, 'Opera in Conrad: "More Real than Anything in Life"', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 13, no. 1 (1980), Appendix, 15–16.

unidentifiable. Known to have read widely in history, biography and memoir, he must have had recourse to standard authorities on the period: Thomas Carlyle's popular three-volume *The French Revolution: A History* (1837), a copy of which he owned; or Hippolyte Taine's *La Révolution* (1878–83). Horatio Nelson had attracted his attention in his essay 'Palmar qui meruit ferat' (1905), commissioned by the *Standard* to mark the centenary of the Battle of Trafalgar, and republished as the final chapter of *The Mirror of the Sea*, under the title 'The Heroic Age'.

For background, Conrad must have called upon several of the volumes in the scholarly series *Publications of the Navy Records Society*, to which he subscribed during his later life.¹ (*The Rover* alludes to a letter reproduced in its volume of *Dispatches and Letters Relating to the Blockade of Brest, 1803–1805* (1902).)² Other works in Conrad's library that are pertinent to the era in which *The Rover* is set included the recently published first volume of *The Letters of Earl St Vincent, 1801–1804* (1921), edited by D. Bonner-Smith, covering the First Lord of the Admiralty's first year at its most controversial period; the *Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thomas Byam Martin, 1773–1854* (1898–1902), edited by Admiral Sir Richard Vesey-Hamilton; *The Correspondence of Admiral John Markham, 1801–1807* (1904), edited by Sir Clements R. Markham; and *Nelson and the Neapolitan Jacobins* (1903), edited by H. C. Gutteridge, which covers the suppression of the Jacobin rising of June 1799 in the Kingdom of Naples.

For his cameo of Nelson, Conrad had an embarrassment of riches to draw from, including the *Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson* (1845), edited by Sir Harris Nicholas – in particular the volume covering the years 1803–4. He owned Robert Southey's *The Life of Horatio Lord Nelson* (1813), and Nelson's letters to Lady Hamilton as well as several biographies would have been easily accessible. Sir Henry Newbolt's *The Year of Trafalgar* (1905), brought out for the event's centenary, had also caught his attention. That Conrad had done some research into Napoleon's exile on Elba for *Suspense* has been

¹ Hodgson & Co., *A Catalogue*, p. 9.

² See 'Explanatory Note' 204.32.

established.¹ Some of his explorations might have spilled over into *The Rover*. For instance, William Henry Fitchett's 1904 novel *The Commander of the 'Hirondelle': A Tale of the Great Blockade* uses Toulon as its opening backdrop and features in its title a ship that figures in *The Rover* (31.24–25). Such interpenetrations occurred in a general way, with Conrad inspired by his reading but not recasting it as he had, for example, in *Lord Jim* or *Nostromo*, parts of which were crafted out of history books and learned studies.

His most evident debts from his reading for aspects of period colour, Peyrol's personality and certain incidents in the novel are to *Voyages, aventures et combats. Souvenirs de ma vie maritime (Tales, Adventures and Battles: Memories of my Life at Sea)* (1851) – no doubt partly fictional – by (Ambroise-)Louis Garneray (1783–1857), a French naval seaman turned corsair and marine painter whose work Conrad had read in childhood and had drawn upon for the *Patna* scene in *Lord Jim*.² Conrad's search for a copy of Garneray, surely with the intention of re-reading it for the work in hand, came to fruition only when he had already completed *The Rover*.³ But his memories of an enthusiastic childhood reading proved sufficiently vivid.

Like Garneray, Peyrol has served in the French Royal Navy as well as outside of it, and his ports-of-call, although typical enough given France's far-flung overseas possessions at the time, are similar: Madagascar, Port-Louis and Madras (the latter two known to Conrad). Garneray's eight years as a prisoner in British hands, dramatized in his *Captivité de Louis Garneray. Neuf années en Angleterre. Mes pontons* (1851), might well inform Peyrol's and Symons's fear of captivity in pontoons, those floating prisons that Honoré de Balzac had called 'indignes d'un peuple civilisé' ('unworthy of a civilized people') in his novel *La Rabouilleuse*, with which Conrad was familiar;⁴ Garneray and Peyrol are acquainted with the famous pirate Surcouf; and both have a command

¹ See 'Appendix B: The British Museum Notebook, 1920', *Suspense* (2011), pp. 295–9.

² [J. H. Stape], 'Introduction', *Lord Jim*, ed. J. H. Stape and Ernest W. Sullivan II (2012), p. xl.

³ Conrad to G. Jean-Aubry, 14 May 1923 (*Letters*, VIII, 97). For the history of the novel's composition, see 'The Text: An Essay' below.

⁴ Honoré de Balzac, *Scènes de la vie de province*, vol. II (Paris, Hetzel, 1843), 154. On Conrad and Balzac, see John Stape, "'One can learn something from Balzac': Conrad and Balzac", *Conrad: Intertexts and Appropriations – Essays in Memory of Yves Hervouet*, ed. Gene M. Moore, Owen Knowles and J. H. Stape (1997), pp. 103–18.

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of English (the real-life Garneray, in fact, much more than his fictional counterpart and acting as a translator from English to French). But the novel's indebtedness to Garneray is more multifaceted, with Conrad's imagination inspired by both the adventures of a swashbuckling eighteenth-century corsair in the Eastern Seas – mutiny, blood-covered decks, sinkings in shark-infested waters – and their accompanying daring-do atmosphere. For good measure, this source offers a portrait of intense, yet shifting and insecure, loyalties of a group of sailing-men living outside the law.

Another overarching inspiration lies in the traditional tropes and stock characters of Greek New Comedy and, more pertinently perhaps for Conrad, their reinvention by Shakespeare, whereby the older generation is replaced by the new, in a perpetual cycle of death and rebirth, more often than not symbolic, as when Arlette faints in the arms of Peyrol, who feels 'with fear her body become still, grow rigid in his arms' before he lays her 'gently on the deck. Her eyes were closed, her hands remained clenched; every sign of life had left her white face' (187.35–36, 37–39). Conrad's resort to this genre and its stock characters sees Peyrol in the role of a genial and relaxed *senex iratus* – Arlette addresses him twice as 'Papa Peyrol' (133.30, 134.6) – as Arlette and Réal form the new society that replaces the worn-out one, a symbolic renewal after their triumph over trial and opposition. The latter is offered here by Catherine, who is alternately both the good and evil stepmother of folklore and myth; and by the celibate and cold-hearted abbé, who, like Arlette's aunt, would like to imprison her in a female society, a threat that Réal defies and ultimately defeats.

Conrad's other main debt to generic comedy is the moment of the casting-out of the villain (much as Malvolio is excluded from the new society formed at *Twelfth Night's* close), found in myth and folklore in the killing of the ogre or evil genius who keeps the maiden in his thrall, a trope deriving from antiquity and embodied in such myths as Perseus and Andromeda. Peyrol's sacrifice of his life in a symbolic storm – in mythological terms, a blood offering made to appease the angered sea gods – is an act undertaken to bring into being a better France as he rids her of the demonic 'blood-drinker' (23.24) Scevola and the baleful memories of Revolutionary excesses he represents, and one that frees from the monster the former strangers whom he has come to embrace and even love.

CONRAD WAS AT the height of his fame when *The Rover* appeared in the United States and England in late 1923. With a career of nearly thirty years and more than twenty books behind him, he was internationally recognized as being among a handful of contemporary writers whose achievements had conferred ‘classic’ status on them, as witnessed by some of the waggish comments that greeted the publication of *The Rover*: ‘Masterpieces have become the standard product of Mr. Conrad’s workshop. For the past thirty years one could have fancied Mrs. Conrad calling to her husband: “Finish your next masterpiece, Joseph dear. You’re keeping lunch.”’¹ By this juncture, particularly since the publication of *Chance* (1914), Conrad had also won over the popular audience – one reviewer could speak of a ‘Conrad fashion’ (K. K., *Evening Standard*, 1 December 1923, p. 3; *CR*, IV, 261) – that had neglected his earlier, critically acclaimed novels. Readers and reviewers now came to a ‘new Conrad’ with clear expectations of what he would provide and how; and both would judge him not only against his contemporaries but also, fairly or not, against the high standards he had set for himself. As the novelist and playwright J. B. Priestley observed in the *London Mercury*, ‘if *The Rover* does not take a place among its author’s major works . . . it is simply because Mr. Conrad’s peculiar excellences, the qualities that really mark him off from half-a-dozen other storytellers of the first rank, are not to be found, or at least not to be found in any considerable measure, in this new story’ (January 1924, 320; *CR*, IV, 318).

In contrast to the outset of his career, when he was one writer among many making his way, in 1923 the publication of a new Conrad novel was a major event on the publishing calendar. Writing on the eve of the novel’s appearance in New York, the American journalist and playwright Laurence Stallings cast the sense of anticipation in theatrical terms: ‘One might . . . imagine long lines before the bookshops, waiting for the doors to open and watching electricians as they put up the name of Joseph Conrad in electric lights before the portal’.² *The Rover* also benefitted from canny advertising and advance publicity, the novel being published with the Christmas book market

¹ Laurence Stallings, ‘The First Reader. The Heroic Stanza’, *The World* (New York), 30 November 1923, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*

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in view. As a result, sales proved excellent. In the United States, its publication also occurred in the wake of the writer's visit to New York and New England the previous May, when throngs of reporters and photographers had greeted Conrad's arrival at the dock and dogged his every footstep, as Doubleday's marketing department put on display one of the firm's literary lions.

Critical evaluations of *The Rover* ranged across a wide spectrum: the *Sunday Times* reviewer declared that it 'ranks high among Mr. Conrad's achievements', while Raymond Mortimer, a member of the Bloomsbury Group and a writer and journalist of the rising generation, judged it 'downright bad'.¹ This divide reflects a generational change already well under way, with Conrad caught in the crossfire at a moment when belletristic criticism and its vague, impressionistic vocabulary, once dominant, was falling out of fashion. The war had replaced age-old customs of deference with a new frankness of expression, and the disillusioned young – the generation that F. Scott Fitzgerald described as having 'grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken'² – found any sacred cow fair game.

The novel's reception somewhat presaged the decline in Conrad's reputation that set in shortly after his death, and some of the overblown praise for it assisted in this. Contrary to its intentions, the fulsome encomium by Conrad's literary executor, Richard Curle, in the *Daily Mail*, did the author no favours. Nor did a priori judgements, such as the *Yorkshire Post's* prepublication note hailing the appearance of the writer's 'great new novel' (21 November 1923, p. 4). As a prominent American academic critic summarized this overpraise, the 'weary contrivances' of Conrad's final period were extolled as 'works by a magician of genius'.³

Reviews on both sides of the Atlantic were mixed, although favourable responses tended to outweigh negative ones. The reverential tone and almost ritual proclamation of Conrad's 'genius' by well-established critics tended to paper over a deeper disappointment with the novel that the writer himself could not fail to notice – although he blamed it on overly energetic advance publicity about the ever-forthcoming *Suspense*. He claimed that reviewers had been

¹ *Sunday Times*, 16 December 1923, p. 8; *New Statesman*, 15 December 1923, p. 306 (*CR*, IV, 304, 296).

² *This Side of Paradise* (1921), p. 304.

³ Hugh Kenner, *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers* (1988), p. 59.

mised¹ to believe that his ‘Mediterranean novel’ was *The Rover* and not, as it turned out, *Suspense*, which he had puffed in interviews with the press during his American tour. The following comment exemplifies the confusion:

the publishers let it be noised about that Conrad had gone to the Mediterranean shore of France to spend a few months in research before beginning to write. With that news dozens of us became convinced that we should soon have a psychological study of Bonaparte, or a study of the moods of his day which would be a contribution to the sum of human knowledge of life.

How totally different was the book from our expectations.

(*Buffalo Evening News*, 5 January 1924, p. 10)

Most British and American reviews targeted the same topics: the interest aroused by the novel’s characters, judged psychologically true to life or not; the nature and pacing of the action; Conrad’s by now famous prose style and descriptive skill; and the development of the plot. Aware that the writer had entered the culminating phase of his career, some reviewers also used the novel’s publication to essay general evaluations.

Much commentary in the popular press evaluated the novel’s characters, their *vividness* or lack of it sufficing to make or break a book’s appeal. Conrad’s titular hero was generally acknowledged to be well drawn and one of the novel’s achievements. Glasgow’s *Evening News* found Peyrol ‘as convincing as a piece of sculpture by Rodin’; *Punch* went so far as to declare him ‘the crest of Mr. Conrad’s achievement’; and *T. P.’s & Cassell’s Weekly* stated that with Peyrol, Conrad had worked ‘a miracle’.² The *Outlook’s* reviewer took a dissenting tack, arguing that the protagonist was ‘not convincing’ and finding the motivation of his final act at odds with his character:

it is a sacrifice which belongs rather to the stern magnanimity of a Conradesque sea captain than to this elderly adventurer, who since the age of twelve to his retirement, looted, murdered, and mutinied in all services on all coasts. And, throughout, Peyrol is sufficiently unlike an eighteenth-century seaman, even less like a pirate, to make us want his sudden delicacies and loyalties more thoroughly explored than Mr. Conrad’s allusive and indirect methods allow. It is possible that Peyrol came through his lurid career with a proper sense of patriotism and a pleasantly avuncular manner towards young ladies unimpaired. One would, however, like to know how it happened. (8 December 1923, p. 428; *CR*, IV, 285)

¹ Conrad to Eric Pinker, 3 February 1924 (*Letters*, VIII, 296–7).

² *Evening News* (Glasgow), 6 December 1923, p. 2; *Punch*, 19 December 1923, p. 599; *T. P.’s & Cassell’s Weekly*, 15 December 1923, p. 313; *CR*, IV, 277, 304, 302.

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Critics were divided as to the success of the other characters. The *Westminster Gazette's* reviewer and the *Observer's* veteran literary editor J. C. Squire sounded a note repeated by other commentators: 'The other figures have less definition and actuality' (3 December 1923, p. 4; *CR*, IV, 275); 'Aunt Catherine and the lieutenant are less successful; they are visualised, but the attempts to make them known do not quite carry conviction' (9 December 1923, p. 4; *CR*, IV, 288). In contrast, Conrad's friend Edward Garnett, in a private letter that prompted a thoughtful reply from the author about his intentions, saw in Catherine and Réal the 'two characters seized with the finest perception'.¹ But he also argued for a more robustly drawn Scevola, objecting to his fading away 'steadily before our eyes, like a revolutionary scarecrow'. Another Conrad intimate, Curle, in a review entitled 'Conrad Looks at Nelson' and crafted to please the author while keeping a steady eye on the popular audience, acclaimed the portrait of Nelson – a drawing-card in Britain – as 'masterly', and assured potential readers that all the major characters were 'extraordinarily vivid and touched strongly with that inward and significant vitality which Mr. Conrad knows so well how to suggest' (*Daily Mail*, 3 December 1923, p. 8; *CR*, IV, 263).

Arlette attracted differing responses. The influential American critic Percy A. Hutchison claimed that she 'dominates the story': she is 'felt in every page and line, altho whole chapters may go by and her name not be mentioned'; the *Times Literary Supplement's* Arthur Sydney McDowall saw her as 'beautifully drawn', her love for Réal 'subtly conveyed' in 'two fine scenes of revelation'.² The *Spectator's* reviewer, the poet and writer Martin Armstrong, commented that she had 'a pathos and attractiveness greater than any other of her creator's women' (15 December 1923, p. 961; *CR*, IV, 299). By contrast, the New York *World's* Louis Weitzenkorn, a reporter turned editor and critic, dismissed her as 'a talking woman and an uninteresting one. He began her in the Conradian silence and ended her as a commonplace person' (9 December 1923, Editorial Section, p. 6; *CR*, IV, 345).

Reviewers noted the absence of a typically Conradian complexity of narrative development – Conrad himself revealed to Garnett that

¹ See Appendix C, p. 506. Garnett also reviewed the novel: see 'De nieuwe roman van Conrad', *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Amsterdam), 29 December 1923, sect. 3, 9–10.

² *Literary Digest International Book Review*, December 1923, 67; [Arthur Sydney McDowall], *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 December 1923, p. 849 (*CR*, IV, 321, 280).

his aim had been ‘brevity ab initio’¹. The adjective most often called upon to describe the action was ‘thrilling’, with the closing chase scene singled out for praise. This newfound simplicity in Conrad’s late career – in part, a shift to attract a popular audience – provoked alternating responses, perhaps fuelled by a feeling that more ambitious literary aims had been sacrificed. The reviewer of *The Times*, for instance, damned it with faint praise: ‘Mr. Conrad’s new story . . . is one that everyone will read with an enjoyment unmitigated by any necessity for intellectual strivings’ (3 December 1923, p. 15; *CR*, IV, 272). Raymond Mortimer went even further: ‘*The Rover* is not difficult to read; a boy of twelve might quite enjoy it’ (*New Statesman*, 15 December 1923, p. 306; *CR*, IV, 296), a theme taken up by other reviewers who located the novel’s generic identity in ‘the adventure novel beloved of boys’ as purveyed by G. A. Henty (*The Spectator*, 15 December 1923, p. 961; *CR*, IV, 300). Other commentators noted a slowness of pace, one finding in it a source of confusion: ‘So leisurely is he, in fact, that he quite forgets at times to tell his readers very important facts about his characters and what they are doing. This is puzzling, and forces the reader to wait for a long time before he can gain any clear idea of the matter in hand’ (*Buffalo Evening News*, 5 January 1924, p. 10). Noting with admiration what he characterized as the narrative line’s ‘easiness’, the future poet Basil Bunting, a critic of the ‘younger generation’, lamented that the ‘just desserts’ ending was merely tagged on: ‘Mr. Conrad adds a kind of epilogue which seems to me to be unnecessary and even a bit of a bore’ (*Transatlantic Review* (Paris), August 1924, 134; *CR*, IV, 387). The critic for the Glasgow *Evening News* took Conrad to task even more severely for a conclusion that, he felt, spoiled a fine effect: ‘a curiously feeble chapter of recapitulation dispels the glamorous memory of the Rover’s death’ (6 December 1923, p. 2; *CR*, IV, 278). Considering the novel unsuccessful, the same reviewer attributed its stylistic weakness to ‘a lack of conviction about the latter half of the book’, singling out chapter XII as ‘clumsy’ and as having ‘an almost ingenuous air of artificiality’ (277, 278).

By this point in his career, style had long been recognized as a Conrad hallmark, but the kind essayed in the novel – the product of dictation, although this was not publicly known – attracted censure. The critic of the *Daily Express* argued that ‘there are phrases in

¹ Appendix C, p. 507.

“The Rover” that any schoolmaster would cut out of a fifth form boy’s essay, and rightly’ (*Daily Express*, 3 December 1923, p. 7; *CR*, IV, 262). The generally appreciative J. C. Squire pointed out problems with idiom: ‘there are memorable phrases, but fewer than we expect. And he has allowed himself more clumsy phrases than usual. Some of these result from carelessness; some, not always inaccurate, are odd in English though they would not be odd in French’ (*Observer*, 9 December 1923, p. 4; *CR*, IV, 290). On the other hand, defending what others believed a prose style not up to the high mark that Conrad had set for himself, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*’s literary editor Fanny Butcher contended that the novel’s language was determined by its chosen subject: ‘Joseph Conrad . . . writes of the overtones of life, the subtleties, and his language, therefore, is not the obvious. Occasionally a sentence seems, upon first reading, complicated. But upon another reading it is the only and the simplest way of saying exactly what he wanted to say’ (1 December 1923, p. 10; *CR*, IV, 322).

Despite disappointment with the novel’s style, certain commentators praised Conrad’s descriptive skills. The *Aberdeen Press and Journal* lauded the ‘fresh and youthful beauty that is unforgettable in its descriptive passages’ (6 December 1923, p. 2). Curle wrote that Conrad ‘has created very strikingly for us the physical characteristics of Southern France’ (*Daily Mail*, 3 December 1923, p. 8; *CR*, IV, 264). And, consonant with Conrad’s reputation as a sea-writer, boomed by Doubleday’s as a major selling point, Percy A. Hutchinson foregrounded the novel’s treatment of the sea: ‘there are innumerable descriptive lines such as only Conrad can write; and he sees the Mediterranean as only one who is both master-seaman and master-craftsman could see it’ (*Literary Digest International Book Review*, December 1923, 67; *CR*, IV, 321). The ‘younger generation’ – again represented by Raymond Mortimer – would, however, disagree even on this general point: ‘It contains a few descriptive passages of a carefully varnished beauty, but none, I think, comparable to his best in this sort’ (*New Statesman*, 15 December 1923, p. 306; *CR*, IV, 297).

Finally, the working out of the plot was found to be alternately simple and complicated. New York’s *Vanity Fair* assured readers who might have found early Conrad ‘obscure’ that ‘Here is a narrative as swift as any dullard could wish, and a plot as plain as a pikestaff’ (February 1924, 100). The reviewer for the *Church Times* held another view:

the plot, though less involved than many of Mr. Conrad's works, is difficult to follow in places, and those who take the book up to read require all their wits about them to follow out its intricate threads. The author has a habit of implying certain things without saying them in so many words, which must be extremely baffling to the ordinary reader. (21 December 1923, p. 724)

Unlike the critical response to what Jacques Berthoud has called Conrad's 'major phase',¹ academic criticism of *The Rover*, itself emergent with the Conrad revival in the 1940s, has been measured and limited, inclining to reflect the novel's own tightly conceived terms and not attracting, like other Conrad works, a large body of exegesis. Commentators have been content with evaluations that follow the main lines established by the novel's contemporary reception, seeing it as an evidence of failing powers and entrenching *The Rover* in the second rank of Conrad's achievement. Other critics, alert to its flaws, have more even-handedly explored its intentions and interests, not least of which lie in disguised aspects of Conrad's life. The tools brought to bear by New Criticism favoured multilayered, tangled works, a category in which *The Rover* does not naturally fit. Conrad's overt call upon the Galatea and Pygmalion myth did, however, elicit archetypal criticism.² More recent critical trends – New Historicism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction – have not been much applied to the novel. Gender criticism proves the exception, and the 'male gaze', incest and patriarchy have been topics explored.³ *The Rover* has also featured in several reassessments of Conrad's late career.⁴ And a deft close analysis of its narrative procedures has discovered a sceptical novel more complexly structured than generally thought, with deferrals, chronological disruptions and changes in point of view.⁵

Practising writers have been intrigued by it. Galsworthy thought 'well' of it, and Arnold Bennett assured Conrad that it not only 'perfectly held' him but also 'that the hand of the master is everywhere

¹ Jacques Berthoud, *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase* (1978).

² David Leon Higdon, 'Conrad's *The Rover*: The Grammar of a Myth', *Studies in the Novel*, 1 (1969), 17–26.

³ See Gary Geddes, *Conrad's Later Novels* (1980); Daniel R. Schwarz, *Conrad: Later Fiction* (1982); Susan Jones, *Conrad and Women* (1999); Katherine Isobel Baxter, *The Swan Song of Romance* (2010).

⁴ Robert Hampson, 'The Late Novels', *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. J. H. Stape (1996), pp. 150–6; Jane M. Ford, *Patriarchy and Incest from Shakespeare to Joyce* (1998), pp. 110–19.

⁵ Hugh Epstein, 'The Rover: A Post-Skeptical Novel?', *Conradiana*, 37 (2005), 101–18.

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in it'.¹ On rereading it nearly three decades after its appearance, the poet John Lehmann found in it 'the way of poetry, a touching of chords that awaken echoes in the deeper chambers of the imagination'.² Before that, the young Ernest Hemingway had devoured three issues of the *Pictorial Review's* serialization in the course of a night spent at a hotel in a bleak Ontario town: 'When morning came I had used up all my Conrad like a drunkard.'³ Another, more recent popular American writer, John Irving, who confessed that 'reading Conrad almost kills me', thought that '*The Rover* is okay, but most suitable for young males (under 18)'.⁴ It did have that fate in England: a copy was entered in Eton College Library in the year of its publication, and the novel would later become a set text on secondary school syllabi. The interests of that wider audience, unlike those of academic critics, were mainly in action, story and character.

Although the American scholar Lawrence Graver claimed that *The Rover* must figure among 'the most tedious best sellers ever written',⁵ its strengths have none the less attracted both common readers and sophisticated interpreters in sufficient number to keep it out of the category of Conrad works of specialist interest only, like *The Arrow of Gold* and *Suspense*. The French physician and translator Philippe Neel, who found it 'si plein, si coloré, si riche de vie intérieure' ('so full, so coloured, so rich in interior life'), ventured that it would be well received by the French public.⁶ It was translated in early 1927 by its dedicatee, G. Jean-Aubry, in the *Revue de Paris*.

The Rover was recognized by clear-sighted critics on its initial publication as second-rank Conrad, a judgement posterity has little quarrelled with. Yet it affords pleasures, even if more intermittently than in Conrad's masterworks. Several of these pleasures lie on its surface, while others can be discovered in ideas more hinted at than developed. The moral issues it addresses – fidelity, commitment, the opposing poles of order and anarchy – troubled the writer throughout his life, as did the nature of national allegiance. His treatment of these

¹ Conrad to John Galsworthy, 22 February 1924 (*Letters*, VIII, 318); Arnold Bennett to Conrad, 17 November [= December] 1923 (*Portrait in Letters*, p. 232).

² 'On Re-reading "The Rover"', *World Review*, June 1951, 41–5 (42).

³ 'Conrad Supplement, III', *Transatlantic Review*, 2, no. 3, (1924), 342.

⁴ 'The Books I Read', *The Imaginary Girlfriend: A Memoir* (1996), p. 23.

⁵ *Conrad's Short Fiction* (1969), p. 170.

⁶ Philippe Neel to Conrad, 7 January 1924 (*Portrait in Letters*, p. 234).

subjects here, even if it does not greatly extend what he had already said, offers insights into his ideas. And somewhat lost in the preoccupation with placing the novel have been its secondary interests: its portrayal of friendship, its discussion of the challenges posed by ageing and by an awareness of mortality, and the ways that language and culture can conjoin as well as divide individuals and societies.

The novel's ambivalences and affirmative note have alike proved troubling, with Andrzej Busza observing that difficulties in assessing it are 'in the final analysis part of a larger problem' located in 'the Conrad phenomenon as such'.¹ Although several commentators have stressed its continuity of ideas, *The Rover* seems to have perplexed some of Conrad's contemporaries in departing from the complexity and relentless scepticism that had characterized the author's early work. Looked at from another angle, however, the new, affirmative note in Conrad's final completed work makes more finely grained the pervasive scepticism for which he is renowned.

¹ 'Introduction', *The Rover*, ed. Andrzej Busza and J. H. Stape (1992), pp. ix–xxx (xxvii).